

Light



....ON A NEW WORLD

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Abraham— friend of God

IT HAS LONG been the privilege of monarchs to reward faithful subjects by conferring on them a title or honour. Military leaders and their serving officers, statesmen and government officials, and, in the United Kingdom, people from all walks of life, are sometimes given a title or honour which recognises the contribution they have made to public life and service. In June of each year, Her Majesty the Queen graciously bestows such rewards in what is called the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

There is nothing new about this practice of rewarding faithful or outstanding service. In the Old Testament there was the case of the King of Moab, who offered to bestow honours upon Balaam the prophet for services to be rendered. Balak the King said:

'... I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me ...'¹

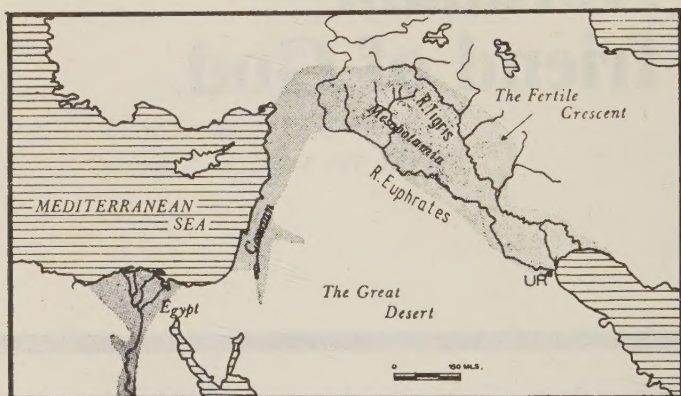
Later in Israel's history, Belshazzar the king of Babylon decorated Daniel the prophet because of his ability to foretell the future, even though the future for Belshazzar was bleak indeed!

'Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him ...'²

In this article we are going to review the life of a man whose lifestyle was very different from that of either Daniel or the people Her Majesty the Queen has recently honoured.

¹ Numbers 22. 17 ² Daniel 5. 29

Abraham—the friend of God! What honour indeed that this patriarch should be so generously described! What we propose to do is to consider the life and works of Abraham, and in so doing, learn how he pleased God, so that OUR lives can be attuned to the mind of God.



Map of the Fertile Crescent showing the ancient city of Ur from which Abraham made his tremendous journey to Canaan—a journey of faith.

UR OF THE CHALDEES

In the New Testament Stephen recounts how Abraham was called to God's service:

'The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia.'

It was from the city of Ur of the Chaldees that Abraham set out on a journey of faith. He left behind a city which was prosperous, the inhabitants being a knowledgeable and cultured people. The work of the archaeologist⁴ has revealed the advanced civilisation upon which Abraham turned his back, to become a travelling sheep farmer. He exchanged the more permanent protection of a house for the privations of tent dwelling, and the uncertain prospects of nomadic life, nearly 2,000 years B.C.

'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.'

³ Acts 7. 2

⁴ 'Excavations at Ur' C. L. Woolley, 1954.

⁵ Genesis 12. 1

THE PROMISES

It was an unmistakable call to separation. Depart from your country—say goodbye to your family—leave your father's house. And for what purpose? Later on was told:

'I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.'⁶

is important for us to recognise that Abraham believed God. His departure from Ur the Chaldees was an act of *faith*, without which no man can please God—this is the powerful lesson provided by Abraham: OBEDIENCE and FAITH. So the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament, in discussing the great importance of believing that God exists and is able to reward the obedient, has this to say about Abraham:

'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.'⁷

The record goes on to say that he and his family lived in tents, looking to God to fulfil the promises which He had made.

When God calls men and women to His service today, He expects them to respond after the example of Abraham. To *believe* Him, to *obey* Him and to *show faith* in the promise of salvation from death, for THIS is the reality of these promises. Again, it is the New Testament commentary which leaves us in no doubt:

'The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."⁸

WHAT THE PROMISES MEAN

Perhaps we ought to look more carefully at just what it was that God promised Abraham. In Genesis chapters 12 and 13 we can see clearly that the promise came in four parts:

1. A personal blessing upon Abraham (or Abram, as he was then known).
2. Through him would be formed a great nation.
3. Abraham would have a great impact upon all who came into contact with him and his descendants.
4. Through Abraham ALL families on earth will be blessed.

Read the account again for yourself and then reflect upon the outcome in Abraham's life. When he left Haran—halfway on his journey to Canaan, the land of promise—he

Genesis 12. 2 ⁷ Hebrews 11. 8 ⁸ Galatians 3. 8 (N.I.V.)

was 75 years old, married to Sarah, but without children. More significantly, he was without a son and heir—one who would continue his name after his death.

Abraham became a very rich man: *'Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.'*⁹

It was also true to say that part 3 of the promise was realised very early in his calling. Genesis chapter 14 tells of the way in which he and his private household army disposed of the kings of Canaan who had taken Lot captive. Truly had God spoken: *'I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.'*¹⁰

How many nations have had cause to reflect upon those words! In our own time we have seen the truth of the promise, for it was a foolish Hitler who trod in the footsteps of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a path which for both men led to disaster.

TO ABRAHAM—A SON

It will be clear to the reader, however, that all the riches in the world were of no great value to Abraham while he had no son. Abraham's concern was expressed when God appeared to him once again.

*'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless . . .'*¹¹

All that Abraham possessed was destined to pass into the hands of his steward Eliezer. By this time Abraham was over 90 years old, and Sarah his wife old and barren. Taking the matter into his own hands, he followed the custom of the times and through his concubine, Hagar, was born a son, Ishmael. But this was not the way

*'And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.' (Sarah means "Princess") 'And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations . . .'*¹²

Significantly, Abram's name was also changed about this time, to Abraham meaning 'father of a great multitude'.¹³ Abraham laughed! He at 99, his wife at 90 years of age? A son? Later both of them were to laugh aloud with joy.

*'At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.'*¹⁴

And so it was.

*'Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, BECAUSE SHE JUDGED HIM FAITHFUL WHO HAD PROMISED. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.'*¹⁵

⁹ Genesis 13. 2 ¹⁰ Genesis 12. 3 1-2 15 (R. V.) ¹¹ Genesis 15. 1

¹² Genesis 17. 15, 16 ¹³ Genesis 17. 5 ¹⁴ Genesis 18. 14 ¹⁵ Hebrews 11. 11, 12

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROMISES

Ponder for a moment upon the way in which God's promise to Abraham developed. Not suddenly! No instant cure! It is not in the nature of men to be patient, but we must learn that God's way is the best way—indeed, the ONLY way, to salvation. Twenty-five years were necessary in God's purpose with Abraham, during which he witnessed the good hand of God in his life. He WAS blessed, as were his friends, and he DID have a son in his old age. It was through Isaac that the future lay, as the writer to the Hebrews said:

'By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'¹⁶

Today, the same challenge is issued by God. It DOES mean forsaking the world of the ungodly, and a willingness to walk with God. Like the faithful of old, we must declare that here we have '*no continuing city*',¹⁷ but we seek one to come.

BUT, the promise to US is no less!

'Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are all the children of Abraham.'¹⁸

We too can have the same assurance of hope as did Abraham. We too can see the hand of God in our lives, if we put our trust in him. But . . . would we have had the trust and faith of Abraham?

TAKE NOW THY SON

Once again, the faith of Abraham was to be tested to the full. The record in Genesis is stark, and again, quite unmistakable.

'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering . . .'¹⁹

The strength of this man, now well over 100 years of age, was unabated.

'He saddled his ass . . . and went unto the place of which God had told him.'²⁰

Abraham went as he was told—no doubt with heavy heart, but with an evident determination to do the will of his God. Three days they travelled to Mount Moriah to a setting which was to become historic in the purpose of God.

To Isaac, who knew nothing of the instruction God had given his father, there was only one thing missing. There was wood, and fire—but no animal for a sacrifice. In

Hebrews 11. 9 ¹⁷ Hebrews 13. 14 ¹⁸ Galatians 3. 6
Genesis 22. 2 ²⁰ Genesis 22. 3

answering his question, Abraham replied: *'God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.'*²¹

Abraham's trust in God was seen also in his confident instruction to the young men who accompanied them: *'... I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.'*²²

Abraham's faith had yet to be fully tested. Not until Isaac was bound, not until he lay upon the altar, with the knife ready to slay him, did God intervene and show His grace and mercy!

*'Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.'*²³

Surely, every servant of God will pray that no such test be asked of them. Yet many *have* given their lives in a willing sacrifice, and there must always be the commitment to believe—

*'he that cometh to God MUST believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.'*²⁴

THIS is the lesson from Abraham's life and example. And yet, there is more to it even than this.

ABRAHAM'S SEED

Isaac was indeed the son of faith and promise, through whom the promise of the great nation was fulfilled. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the progenitors of the nation of Israel whose kingdom flourished 1,000 years or so after Abraham's death. But in making the promise to Abraham, God had spoken of a DESCENDANT who would be victorious over his enemies:

*'... thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.'*²⁵

Who was this spoken of? Certainly, Isaac was the seed or descendant through whom Abraham was assured of a name that would not be cut off. In the letter to the Hebrews we are told that Abraham, accounted

*'that God was able to raise him (Isaac) up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.'*²⁶

It is evident, therefore, that Isaac was the portent of greater things to come, and that Abraham's—and later, Isaac's—faith was an essential element in the plan and purpose

²¹ Genesis 22. 8

²² Genesis 22. 5

²³ Genesis 22. 12

²⁴ Hebrews 11. 6

²⁵ Genesis 22. 17,18

²⁶ Hebrews 11. 19

of God. It is left to the Apostle Paul to provide again the divine commentary:

'Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not,
And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.'²⁷

It then is revealed, for the Apostle goes on to make the point that if WE can show the same faith that Abraham showed, then we too can be associated with the same promise:

'For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.
And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'²⁸

WHOSE IS THE LAND OF PROMISE?

The land of Israel and the lands immediately surrounding it are today the subject of bitter controversy among the nations. The recent conflict in the Lebanon has highlighted the intense passion there is in the hearts of so many who have a claim to the land. Humanly speaking, it will never be possible to solve the problem, and the attempts at solutions now being applied can never bring lasting peace. The rightful heir to the throne of Israel will soon return to the earth to claim it for his own, and then *'possess the gate of his enemies'*. Soon the battle cry of ancient Israel will be rekindled:

'Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?'²⁹

Abraham's God and friend—can HE not also be *yours*?

D. J. Evans
Bexley

Galatians 3. 16 ²⁸ *Galatians* 3. 26,29 ²⁹ *II Chronicles* 20. 7

BIBLE READING TABLES

SEPTEMBER				
1	2 Kings	6	Lament.	2
2	.....	7	.....	3
3	.....	8	.....	4
4	.....	9	.....	5
5	.....	10	Ezekiel	1
6	.....	11, 12	.....	2
7	.....	13	.....	3
8	.....	14	.....	4
9	.....	15	.....	5
10	.....	16	.....	6
11	.....	17	.....	7
12	.....	18	.....	8
13	.....	19	.....	9
14	.....	20	.....	10
15	.....	21	.....	11
16	.....	22, 23	.....	12
17	.....	24, 25	.....	13
18	1 Chron.	1	.....	14
19	.....	2	.....	15
20	.....	3	.....	16
21	.....	4	.....	17
22	.....	5	.....	18
23	.....	6	.....	19
24	.....	7	.....	20
25	.....	8	.....	21
26	.....	9	.....	22
27	.....	10	.....	23
28	.....	11	.....	24
29	.....	12	.....	25
30	.....	13, 14	.....	26

OCTOBER				
1	1 Chron.	15	Ezekiel	27
2	.....	16	.....	28
3	.....	17	.....	29
4	.....	18, 19	.....	30
5	.....	20, 21	.....	31
6	.....	22	.....	32
7	.....	23	.....	33
8	.....	24, 25	.....	34
9	.....	26	.....	35
10	.....	27	.....	36
11	.....	28	.....	37
12	.....	29	.....	38
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	.....	39
14	.....	3, 4	.....	40
15	.....	5, 6	.....	41
16	.....	7	.....	42
17	.....	8	.....	43
18	.....	9	.....	44
19	.....	10, 11	.....	45
20	.....	12, 13	.....	46
21	.....	14, 15	.....	47
22	.....	16, 17	.....	48
23	.....	18, 19	Daniel	1
24	.....	20	.....	2
25	.....	21, 22	.....	3
26	.....	23	.....	4
27	.....	24	.....	5
28	.....	25	.....	6
29	.....	26, 27	.....	7
30	.....	28	.....	8
31	.....	29	.....	9

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Revelation 1.3

The Gospel of John

(Part 1)

ACTUALLY UNANIMOUS tradition the book we are now to consider was written by the apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James, yet we look in vain for mention of his name anywhere in the gospel (the John we do find referred to several times in the early chapters is not the writer, but Jesus' forerunner and herald, John the Baptist, son of Zacharias and Elizabeth). Only in the last chapter does our author give a clue to his identity; he is '*the disciple whom Jesus loved*', a description which occurs several times in this gospel—the one who was next to Jesus at the Last Supper, and to whom Jesus, as he hung on the cross, committed the care of his mother Mary.¹

John makes only the gentlest hint of his presence on other occasions, yet the very absence of his name (in contrast with the other accounts) supports our identification. With James and Peter, John was one of the 'inner three' whom Jesus chose from among the Twelve to accompany him on certain special occasions, e.g. on the Mount of Transfiguration and in his great mental conflict in Gethsemane.² Perhaps more than any other disciple, therefore, John was closer to Jesus and heard his Master's most intimate thoughts. This would help to account for the very distinctive and personal style which characterises this gospel. Just as an oil painting differs markedly in approach from a water colour or a photograph of the same subject, so John's gospel gives a special 'dimension' to the recorded life of Jesus. It is not a contradictory account, however, but rather a confirmatory record (it has a great deal in common with the other gospels) and it often strikingly *complements* what the other three evangelists have to say.³

SIMPLE WORDS—PROFOUND THOUGHTS

The vocabulary of this writer is remarkably simple—at first glance! Yet the more we think about it, the deeper and fuller it appears. Simple words like light and darkness, life, world, abide, follow, believe and many others (and phrases such as *'lift up'*, *'glorify God'*) become charged with a very profound meaning in this gospel. For example, two of John the Baptist's disciples *'followed'* Jesus and *'abode'* with him that day (perhaps the unnamed of the two was our reticent author);⁵ a pattern is established here which Jesus uses frequently in his later discourses.⁶ Or consider the change of verbs: *'the law was given by Moses: grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'* Moses was the great prophet by whose agency God's compassion was revealed to Israel; in Jesus, however, the Father's character was *embodied* in full manifestation. As he said to Philip: *'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father'*—a stupendous statement, by any standard.⁸

It is left to John to spell out what, in fact, is true of all the gospels, viz. that each evangelist has of necessity selected and set in order (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) just *some* of the many discourses, events and miracles in Jesus' life, out of the multitude of items which, if all had been recorded, would have filled the world's libraries to overflowing.⁹ John states that his selection has been especially made,

'that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have (everlasting) life through his name.'¹⁰

To emphasize his choice, the Apostle has repeatedly used two special terms—the word *'witness'* (in the sense of actively bearing witness) for the various discourses he records, and *'signs'* rather than miracles or wonders (the Revised Version is more helpful here); both words underline Jesus' claim to be God's Son and Anointed King (the kingship of Jesus has greater emphasis in this gospel than in the others). With these points in mind, we can readily see that John's gospel pursues a very clear line of development. An outline plan of the book is printed on pages 12 and 13 and should be consulted in connection with the following comments.

THE GOSPEL OUTLINE

From the right-hand side we note that John records three Passovers and mentions two other Jewish festivals, proving that Jesus' ministry lasted at least three years. The latter half of the account concerns the last Passover and the week preceding it—just a fortnight in all! Also shown is the fact that John has much more to say than the other evangelists about the Jerusalem phases of Christ's work; the Galilean preaching (marked 'G') takes up a relatively small proportion of the whole.

The introductory section or 'prologue' makes the awesome claim that Jesus is the perfect revealer of his God and Father; all that follows is there to establish the absolute truth of this claim. The final portion is a corresponding 'epilogue', where Jesus

Further appearance to his disciples after his resurrection is accompanied by an eighth sign—the miraculous catch of large fish, none of which was lost. This was a guarantee of the success of the appointed ‘fishers of men’ in the work that lay ahead, with Jesus to oversee their labours.

Within this outer framework we have four ‘books’ or sections, in which the first and last parallel one another, as do the middle two. In a very real sense books two and three are the pivot of the whole gospel, for they document on the one hand the Jewish nation’s final rejection of their Messiah in spite of all the ‘signs’ he had performed in their midst;¹¹ conversely, Jesus’ private witness to the disciples culminated in *their* acceptance of his claims.¹² Exactly the same challenge, to believe Christ’s claims, not credulously but because of their unique and irrefutable evidence, is still the touchstone for us today; it is no exaggeration to say that our whole future and well-being will be decided by our individual response to this challenge.

THE SEVEN SIGNS OF JESUS’ MESSIAHSHIP

Worked into this series of witnessing discourses, and sometimes forming their basis, are the seven major ‘signs’, mostly healing miracles, which confirm Jesus’ claims to all except the spiritually blind. One of these great signs was the healing of a man blind from birth. After Jesus had restored his sight he told the sceptical religious leaders:

‘If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.’¹³

For this ‘insight’ he was thrown out of the temple, because the leaders themselves were blinded by their own prejudice and fearful of losing their leadership status.¹⁴ The greatest sign of all was Jesus’ own resurrection, foreshadowed as it was by the raising of Lazarus, but even that accomplished fact was powerless to convince his implacable enemies, as he himself had foreseen.¹⁵ But for those who accept the eye-witness of the twelve apostles, the fact of Jesus’ resurrection establishes the genuineness of his claims, and that the Father has given him authority to raise the dead, judge them, and give everlasting life to all who have submitted to his discipline.¹⁶

OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

A feature peculiar to this gospel is Jesus’ use of seven allegories to describe some of his special roles; each is introduced by the statement: ‘*I am . . .*’ (see italic quotations in the outline plan). The first two (‘*I am the Bread of Life*’ and ‘*I am the Light of the World*’) are intended to direct the reader’s mind back to God’s great work with His people Israel, when He redeemed them from Egyptian slavery and led them through the desert to Canaan, the Promised Land. For forty years they were sustained by manna, ‘*bread from heaven*’, and were guided in their journeys by the miraculous

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Chapter &
Verse

PROLOGUE: Jesus, Son of God, Revealer of the
Father

1.1

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD,
AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD,
AND THE WORD WAS GOD.

1.14

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH,
AND TABERNACLED AMONG US,
(and we beheld his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the
Father),

FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.

1.18

NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD;
THE ONLY SON, WHO IS IN THE
BOSOM OF THE FATHER,
HE HAS MADE HIM KNOWN.

(R. V. & R. S. V.)

BOOK I: First Signs and Witness

1.19

i Witness of John the Baptist and Other
Disciples: "Behold the Lamb . . ."

G2.1

ii FIRST SIGN (2.11): Water into Wine

2.12

iii Witness in the Temple

2.23

iv Witness to Nicodemus

3.22

v Second Witness of John the Baptist:
"the Bridegroom"

4.1

vi Witness to the Samaritans: "This is
indeed the Saviour of the world"

G4.43

vii SECOND SIGN (4.54): Healing of

1st Passover (2.23)

5.1	i	THIRD SIGN (6.2): Healing at Pool of Bethesda	"A feast" (5.1)
G6.1	ii	FOURTH SIGN (6.14): Feeding 5,000 "I am the Bread of Life"	..... 2nd Passover (6.4)
7.1	iii	Witness at the Feast of Tabernacles	Tabernacles (7.2)
9.1	iv	FIFTH SIGN (9.16): Healing of Blind Man — "I am the Light of the World"	
10.1	v	A Double Allegory: "I am the Door"	
10.40	vi	SIXTH SIGN (12.18): Raising of Lazarus "I am the Resurrection and the Life"	..... Feast of Dedication (10.22)
11.55	vii	Witness of Multitude at the Entering into Jerusalem: Final Warning (12.44ff)	
13.1	BOOK III: Private Witness to the Disciples → Acceptance (cf. 16.30)		
13.31	i	The Last Supper	
15.1	ii	Discourse: Jesus to depart, and the Comforter to come; "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"	
17.1	iii	Allegory: "I am the True Vine"	
18.1	iv	Jesus' Prayer for the Disciples	
18.28	BOOK IV: Last Sign and Witness		
19.38	i	The Arrest and Witness before the High Priest	
G21.1	ii	Witness before Pilate and Crucifixion: "Behold the Man!"	
G21.15	iii	SEVENTH SIGN (2.18-22): the Resurrection	
G21.20	EPILOGUE:		
		Third Appearance to the Disciples	
		Peter and the Beloved Disciple	
		Final Witness of the Apostle John	

3rd Passover
(11.55)

G = Galilean ministry

pillar of cloud and fire.¹⁷ Jesus in this gospel reveals himself as the greater 'bread from heaven' which enables the eater of it to live for ever.¹⁸ He is also 'the Light of the World' by whose light we must 'walk' (i.e. conduct our lives) so that we may be accounted by him as 'sons of light' in the Day of Judgement.¹⁹ These Exodus themes appear frequently in John's gospel, notably when we read that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt (N.I.V. "tabernacled") among us', just as God had dwelt amongst His people in the Tabernacle of Witness.²⁰ Even the allegories of the Vine and the Good Shepherd can be traced back to this source²¹; 'the Door' (of the Sheepfold) is closely related to the latter; likewise crucifixion itself was prefigured when Moses 'lifted up the serpent in the wilderness'.²² If however we do not accept the writings of Moses, we will not be disposed to accept Christ's words either.²³

'THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE'

The two remaining allegories are concerned with the authority given to Jesus, as Son of God, to raise the dead and give them everlasting life. By virtue of this unique power he is 'the resurrection and the life', and 'the way, the truth and the life' (i.e. 'the true and living way')²⁴ on behalf of all who wholeheartedly believe that he is the Messiah. The raising of Lazarus from the dead demonstrated beyond argument the reality of his power, which will soon be exercised again when

'all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out; those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned'.²⁵

But doesn't Jesus say somewhere that the believer 'has everlasting life' already? Yes, he does,²⁶ but he also says repeatedly in the same context that he will raise believers up 'AT THE LAST DAY'.²⁷ So 'having everlasting life' is a matter of promise—as John expressly says elsewhere²⁸—but it is regarded as an established fact because when God promises something it is as good as done! (God's promise to Abraham while he was still childless: 'a father of many nations I have made thee', is another illustration of this principle.²⁹)

DEATH IS A SLEEP

The raising of Lazarus, together with other raisings from the dead recorded in Scripture, poses a knotty problem to those who believe in the immortality of the soul and immediate reward (or punishment) at death. Where was Lazarus during those four days? He was unquestionably a good man, for Jesus loved him.³⁰ According to orthodox church teaching he would have gone straight to heaven. Do we find then that he waxed enthusiastic afterwards about the marvels he had experienced—or perhaps very upset to find himself returned to a previous mortal existence? Neither here nor after any other recorded raisings is there the slightest hint of conscious survival in the

intervening period. Is it not far wiser to accept the Lord's own statement:

'Our friend Lazarus *has fallen asleep*; but I am going there *to wake him up*.'³¹

The disciples misunderstood, so Jesus told them plainly: '*Lazarus is DEAD*'³² Thus, in harmony with many other biblical passages, Jesus affirms that the death state is a sleep, a time of complete unconsciousness, from which people responsible to his judgment seat will be awakened '*at the last day*', i.e. at his second coming.³³

THE PLACE OF REWARD

Tradition dies hard, not only on immortal souls but also in the belief in heaven-going as the Christian's reward. Yet doesn't Jesus speak somewhere of the Father's '*house of many mansions*', in which he promises a place for each of his friends? Yes, he does.³⁴ Is not heaven the Father's house and therefore the place of reward? No, it isn't! We must get the facts clear. Heaven is the Father's '*dwelling place*'³⁵ but it is not, scripturally speaking, His '*house*'. This is a term which the Bible consistently applies to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus himself being witness early in this gospel.³⁶

In the New Testament the concept is extended to include the whole body of believers, who are being built up into a '*spiritual house*' as a dwelling place for God.³⁷ Just as the original temple had many rooms for the use of the priests, and treasure chambers, so in the spiritual house each believer is regarded as a single room and dwelling for the Almighty.³⁸ Jesus confirms this when he promises that each believer who loves him and obeys his teaching will become a '*home*' (literally, '*an abiding place*'—the same word as '*mansion*' earlier in the chapter) in whom both he and his Father will dwell.³⁹ As the faithful High Priest and Advocate over God's '*house*', Jesus is now '*preparing a place*' for them; soon, as he says, he will come again and taken them to himself, that where he is, they may be also.⁴⁰ And where will he be then? His appointed place is on David's throne in Jerusalem⁴¹; it is *there* all his faithful servants will share his rulership.⁴² His kingdom, as he said, '*is not of this world*' (order);⁴³ it is a new order, based on righteousness and incorruptibility (both moral and physical) in its rulership, which in turn will promote the same characteristics in the actions of the earth over which Christ's friends will bear rule.⁴⁴

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

John's gospel raises many other highly important doctrinal issues, not least the position of Jesus in relation to his Father—how are we to reconcile the phrase '*I and the Father are one*' with '*my Father is greater than I*'?⁴⁵ Is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (or Advocate) 'the third person of the Godhead', as taught by virtually all churches in Christendom today? If so, how are we to understand John's statement in

his first letter that Jesus himself is the Advocate with the Father?⁴⁶ In part 2 of the article we hope to examine closely just what John and the other inspired writers say on these extremely important topics.

But we would like to conclude this first part on a more positive note. The lasting impression which this gospel makes on us as we read it is the love of Jesus which he showed to the lame and the blind, to the hungry and the bereaved, and above all to his disciples. In the upper room at the Last Supper he, their Teacher and Lord, ministered humbly to their physical needs, and then in various ways urged them to love one another, just as he had loved them, and to obey his commands.⁴⁷ In spite of the crushing ordeal just ahead of him Jesus devoted his whole attention to the welfare of his 'little flock', and in his closing prayer makes an earnest plea for their unity with him and his Father.⁴⁸ Having committed them to God's care he goes out to meet those who had plotted his destruction, and to submit himself to the death of the cross.

*'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.'*⁴⁹

J. H. Broughton
Pontesbury

NOTES and REFERENCES

(All to this gospel unless otherwise stated)

- ¹ 21. 20,24 ² 13. 23; 19. 26 ³ Luke 9. 28; Mark 14. 33
- ⁴ E.g., only John records Jesus' words (2. 19) which were used in evidence against him at his trial. (Mark 14. 58) ⁵ 1. 39,40 ⁶ 'follow' in 8. 12; 10. 4,5, 27 etc.; 'abide' in 5. 38; 6. 56; 12. 46 etc. ⁷ 1. 17 ⁸ 14. 9 ⁹ 21. 25 ¹⁰ 20. 30,31 ¹¹ 12. 37
- ¹² 16. 30 ¹³ 9. 33 ¹⁴ 11. 45-48 ¹⁵ Luke 16. 31 ¹⁶ 5. 21-23
- ¹⁷ cp. Nehemiah 9. 19,20 ¹⁸ 6. 48-51 ¹⁹ 9. 5; 12. 35-36 ²⁰ 1. 14; Exodus 25. 8
- ²¹ Psalm 80. 1,8 ²² 3. 14 ²³ 5. 46,47 ²⁴ 11. 25; 14. 6 ²⁵ 5. 28,29
- ²⁶ 6. 47,54 ²⁷ 6. 39,40,44,54 ²⁸ I John 2. 25; cp Colossians 3. 3,4
- ²⁹ Romans 4. 17 ³⁰ 11. 5 ³¹ 11. 11 (N.I.V.) ³² 11. 14 ³³ E.g. Daniel 12. 1-2; I Thessalonians 4. 13-18; II Timothy 4. 8; Revelation 11. 15-18 ³⁴ 14. 2
- ³⁵ I Kings 8. 30; Matthew 6. 9 ³⁶ 2. 13-17; Luke 2. 49 and often in the Old Testament
- ³⁷ Ephesians 2. 21,22; Hebrews 3. 5 ³⁸ I Corinthians 6. 19 ³⁹ 14. 23 ⁴⁰ 14. 3
- ⁴¹ Luke 1. 32,33; Psalm 2. 4-9 ⁴² Revelation 2. 26,27; 3. 21 ⁴³ 18. 36
- ⁴⁴ Psalm 45. 16; Isaiah 32. 1; 65. 17-19; II Peter 3. 13 ⁴⁵ 10. 30; 14. 28 ⁴⁶ I John 2. 1
- ⁴⁷ 13. 12-14,34,35 ⁴⁸ 17. 20-23 ⁴⁹ 15. 13,14

These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

John 20.31

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